

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 8

Number 1 *Children of a Lesser Suburb*

Article 35

Fall 12-1-1988

Saying The Words

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Recommended Citation

Harper, Tod (1988) "Saying The Words," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 8 : No. 1 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol8/iss1/35>

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SAYING THE WORDS

Tod Harper

The young minister looked out from the pulpit, assessing the rows of expectant faces before him. He waited, allowing his confidence to grow in the eager silence. With scarcely a downward glance, he opened his dog-eared Bible to the first mark.

"Let us pray!" he said, his baritone voice filling the church.

"Lettuce prey!" the congregation chorused joyfully.

"Our Father," the minister said, gesturing expansively, "who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name."

"Arfs otter," echoed the masses, "wart eleven, hollow beneath I came."

The minister continued passionately. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On Earth, as it is in Heaven," he said.

"Viking dum-dum. My swill begun. Honors, acid isn't heavy," the people replied, matching the minister's fervor.

The minister extended a long index finger high before him. "Give us this day," he demanded.

"Glib bus disdain," came the practiced response.

"Minds that **think**, not just react," the minister said, punctuating in the air with his right hand.

The congregation collectively stuttered and fell silent.

The minister waited, piercing his audience with an unforgiving stare. "Give us this day," he tried again.

"Grievous delay," a portion of the people answered uncertainly.

"The courage and freedom to use Your greatest gift," the minister said, speaking with all the force and sincerity he could muster, "the gift of our intelligence."

The people were utterly silent.

The minister waited.

The silence continued, broken only by the faint rustle of suits and dresses, shifting uneasily on the wooded pews.

"**Substance**, not just empty ritual!" the minister cried, shaking his open hands before him.

Near the back of the church, someone coughed.

A bead of perspiration rolled off the minister's cheek, falling onto his open Bible. He looked down at the tiny dark spot. He read the words there aloud, but the force had gone from his voice.

"Our daily bread," he said.

"Hard ale he read!" the masses sang back, comfortably.